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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 001536

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#)
SUBJECT: PEACE NOW REPORT: MOCH PLANS TO BUILD 73,300 NEW
HOMES IN SETTLEMENTS

REF: TEL AVIV 01247

Classified By: Charges D'affaires Luis G. Moreno for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary and Comment: On July 7, Peace Now's Settlement Watch Coordinator Hagit Ofran provided econoff with an advanced copy of a soon-to-be published report (please protect until published) detailing the Ministry of Construction and Housing's (MOCH) plans to build 73,300 housing units in West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements. At a time when we think Israel should be limiting its settlement activities, Peace Now's report, if true, exposes the MOCH's vast plans to enlarge settlements and is a harsh indictment of Israel's settlement enterprise. Included in the report are details on MOCH plans to build new housing units on Palestinian land seized for security needs and in illegal outposts. According to Peace Now, the MOCH plans cited in the report only constitutes a small portion of settlement plans that the GOI has already approved or that are currently in the approval process. End summary and comment.

MOCH Plans from the National Geographic Portal

12. (SBU) Ofran told econoff that the data cited in the soon-to-be published report is derived from information obtained from the GOI's national geographic portal website (www.govmap.gov.il) -- the official site of the Geographical Information System (GIS) Interministerial Committee and of the Israeli Mapping Center. This website contains a mapping system with various types of government information that can be layered and presented in the form of maps. One layer on this website contains municipal building plans sponsored by the MOCH. This layer includes data detailing the number of housing units in each MOCH settlement plan, an outline showing where a given plan is slated to be built, and whether the plan has already been approved or is currently in the preparatory stages. According to Ofran, the MOCH information cited in the national geographic portal only references plans for which construction has not yet begun or whose construction is only partially completed.

Key Findings

13. (SBU) Below are the key findings of Peace Now's report:

-- The MOCH currently has plans to build a total of 73,302 housing units in settlements: 67,580 in the West Bank; and 5,722 in East Jerusalem.

-- Of the total 73,302 housing units, 15,156 housing units

have been approved. Peace Now estimates that approximately 7,600 of these units have already been built.

-- Of the total number of housing units, plans to build 58,146 units are currently in the planning stages.

-- If construction of all 67,580 West Bank units are realized, the settler population in the West Bank could double (using a coefficient family size of four).

-- In the Gush Etzion bloc, the MOCH has plans to establish a new neighborhood called "Geva'ot" consisting of 3,500 housing units. An additional 13,500 units are planned for Gush Etzion in areas outside the existing built-up areas.

-- The MOCH has included plans to build in six outposts, as recognized by Peace Now: Magen Dan, Givat Hadagan, Givat Hatamar, Bnei Adam, Bat Ayin West, and Hill 26.

-- Approximately 19,000 housing units are planned in settlements that are beyond the planned route of the separation barrier: Kiryat Arba, Karnei Shomoron, Ariel, Geva Binyamin (Adam), Immanuel, and Revava.

14. (C) Ofran was not able to provide econoff the expected date that the report would be published, but said that it could be published as early as next week. Peace Now has already circulated the report with Israeli newspapers and is expecting the report's publication to be "big."

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Some MOCH Plans Highlighted

15. (SBU) Paragraphs 6-11 highlight some of the MOCH plans included in Peace Now's report.

16. (SBU) Kiryat Arba:

According to the report, data from the GOI's national geographic portal website indicates that plans to build 156 housing units in the Kiryat Arba settlement have been approved. Additionally, other plans to build 500 more units are currently in the approval process. These 500 units are slated to be built on lands outside the settlement's perimeter fence and outside the settlement's special security zone, which was recently seized for the settlement's security needs. Approximately one month ago, the Military Appeals Committee rejected an appeal filed by Palestinian landowners against the declaration of their lands as State Land, ending the case which lasted nine years. Peace Now asserts that authorization for the construction of these 500 units could be granted in the near future since the main obstacle -- issues regarding ownership of the land -- has been removed. Kiryat Arba is located next to Hebron in the southern West Bank.

17. (SBU) Givat Hatamar and Givat Hadagan Outposts:

According to the report, the MOCH is planning on building a total of 922 housing units in the Givat Hatamar and Givat Hadagan outposts, located in the Gush Etzion bloc south-west of Bethlehem. Although plans to build 527 units in Givat Hatamar and 395 units in Givat Hadagan have already been approved, Peace Now does not know whether the GOI plans to implement construction of the units in the near future. Ofran also told econoff that construction for caravans has recently commenced in the Givat Hatamar outpost, but doubted that this construction was related to the MOCH plans, which entail the construction of permanent buildings at the sites. Approximately two months ago, Peace Now requested clarification from the Civil Administration about the approved MOCH plans and the ongoing caravan construction, but

the Civil Administration has not yet responded.

¶8. (C) Regarding plans to build new housing units at these sites, Ofra opined that the MOCH may have sponsored these plans because it does not likely view Givat Hatamar and Givat Hadagan as illegal outposts. She recounted that Talia Sasson, author of the 2005 report on illegal outpost that was commissioned by then-Prime Minister Sharon, did not recognize either of these sites as an outpost. Peace Now and the USG, however, both recognize Givat Hatamar as an outpost established prior to March 2001; and Givat Hadagan as an outpost established after March 2001.

¶9. (SBU) Betar Illit C:

MOCH plans to build 790 new housing units in the Betar Illit settlement have already been approved, according to Peace Now's report. Betar Illit is also located in the Gush Etzion bloc. Maps in the report indicate that these 790 units will expand the settlement westward, completely taking over the area between Betar Illit and the Palestinian village of Wadi Fukin. (Note: In April, Prime Minister Olmert's office confirmed to Ambassador Jones that Olmert had re-approved for construction a previously frozen plan to build 682 housing units in Betar Illit (reftel). If Peace Now's report is accurate, the MOCH plans would bring the number of approved, but unbuilt, units in Betar Illit to about 1,500. End note)

¶10. (SBU) Ariel:

According to Peace Now's report, the MOCH is also planning to build an additional 8,000 housing units in the Ariel settlement, located in the northern West Bank. According to the report's maps, construction of these 8,000 units are slated to be built on lands stretching west of Ariel and the Palestinian village of Salfit to the Ariel industrial site. Peace Now cautions that if realized, this plan could add 32,000 new settlers to the settlement. Ariel's current population stands at about 17,000 people. This plan has not obtained final approvals and is still in the "pre-preparation" phase, according to the report. (Note: Ofra was not able to tell econoff if "pre-preparation" meant that the plan had already entered the approval process or not. "Pre-preparation" is the language taken from the GOI website and does not offer further explanation. End note)

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¶11. (U) Press reports from July 14-15 say that Ariel has recently received approval from the GOI to build 27 new factories in its industrial site. According to the Jerusalem Post, Ariel's mayor Ron Nachman said that the approval will triple the current size of the industrial park.

Only a Portion of Plans

¶12. (SBU) Although Peace Now notes that some of the plans from the geographic portal may not be built soon, the goal of the report is to draw attention to the large number of housing units planned for construction by the MOCH in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Moreover, since the report also only discusses MOCH plans -- and does not include any construction sponsored by the Israel Lands Administration, the World Zionist Organization, local settlement councils, or privately-funded construction -- Ofra stressed to econoff that these plans only constitute a small portion of the total number of planned housing units in settlements. Peace Now also does not know if there are other future plans sponsored by the MOCH that are not included in the report.

Comment:

¶13. (C) As part of Embassy's agreement with Peace Now, we will not preempt the publication of their report by approaching the MOCH. Once the report is published, however, Embassy plans to seek clarification from the MOCH on the data cited in Peace Now's report. If the report is true, it represents a continuing troubling trend of GOI settlement construction. Once confirmed, the Embassy will follow-up at the highest levels of the GOI for an explanation. End comment.

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